

# NCEH Office of Terrorism Preparedness and Emergency Response

## Issue Briefing: Mississippi Canyon Oil Spill

**Draft Date:** April 28, 2010

**Description of Issue:** On April 20, 2010, an explosion took place on the Mobil Offshore Drilling Unit (MODU) *Deepwater Horizon* operating in the offshore lease area called the Mississippi Canyon approximately 130 miles southeast of New Orleans, LA. The well head of the production well the MODU was finishing in 5000 feet of water began leaking oil at the rate of 1000 barrels (~42,000 gallons) per day. Efforts to control the release from the surface have failed and a major oil spill threatens the Gulf Coast of the US from the Mississippi River to Panama City, FL.

### **Challenges:**

Potential areas of landfall include 4 Coast Guard Sectors (local units), 2 Coast Guard Districts, 2 Federal Regions, and 4 states.

Systems intended to prevent this kind of event failed to operate apparently due to an equipment malfunction at the well head. Options to control the leak have been initiated but will take weeks to months to complete.

Event has attracted cabinet level and national media attention.

### **Current Actions:**

- Response operations initiated under the National Contingency Plan and the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. Lead Federal Agency is the U.S. Coast Guard and the Lead Federal Official is ADM Mary Landry, Commander, 8<sup>th</sup> Coast Guard District, New Orleans, LA.
- Unified command of the Lead Federal Agency, Lead State Agencies, and the Responsible Party has been established with 3 Incident Command Posts and 1 Area Command Post to coordinate the response.
- As of 4/27, 24 response vessels and 1000 personnel are working to contain the release, disperse the oil slick, or collect and remove oil from the open ocean under the coordination of the Coast Guard.
- Staging areas of response equipment and personnel have been established in 6 locations near areas of anticipated landfall.
- Initial landfall near the South Pass of the Mississippi River projected to occur on 4/29-30. Area is sensitive habitat for many aquatic and avian species, but sparsely populated by humans. Additional landfalls over the three succeeding days are projected for the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts east of the Mississippi River.
- Additional oil is moving to the Northeast towards the Coast of Florida and Alabama near their border; however, computer models do not project landfall within the next 3 days.
- Odor Complaints have been received along the MS and AL Gulf Coast.
- The National Response Team is conducting twice a day briefings with the White House; ATSDR represents HHS on the NRT. The Region IV and VI Regional Response Teams have been activated and briefed.
- At the request of the Lead Agency, EPA is initiating air monitoring along the Coast today.
- In accordance with standard protocols developed in the 1990's and used often since, Coast Guard is considering in-situ burning to keep the heaviest oil out of the sensitive habitats and reduce the odors along the Coast. A "Burn Plan" has been developed and reviewed by multiple agencies, including CDC/ATSDR.
- According to information provided by Department of Interior and NOAA, crude oil from this part of the Gulf is low in sulfides, benzene, PAHs, and paraffins. The oil consists of approximately 25% aromatic hydrocarbons and 70% saturated hydrocarbons. This would tend to imply that most of the significant human health hazards associated with crude oil by inhalation and dermal contact are absent from this material. Primary hazard would tend to be wildlife and not humans.
- 

### **NCEH/ATSDR Actions:**

- OTERP provided initial notification of the incident on 4/23 to NCIPC, OPHPR, HHS, OC, EHHE, EEHS, NIOSH, DTEM, and DRO.
- ATSDR/DTEM has participated in all NRT briefings, including one in the White House Situation Room on 4/24 at the request of HHS/ASPR.
- ATSDR/DRO has made contact with each state health department and notified regional poison control centers of the event. DRO is coordinating interactions with EPA Regional Offices.

- At the request of EPA and in coordination with NIOSH and NCEH, ATSDR has recommended environmental analytes and ambient air action levels to evaluate the results of air monitoring data.
- At the request of the USCG and in coordination with NIOSH, ATSDR has reviewed and provided comments on the In-Situ Burn Plan developed in accordance with the protocol originally approved by CDC/CEHIC.
- At the request of EPA and in coordination with OC and NIOSH, ATSDR has provided technical input on health issues related to the odor complaints in support of the Unified Area Command's Joint Information Center.
- At the request of OTPER, ATSDR continues to review information from the Unified Command posted on the NOAA Incident Hotline and participate in the daily briefings of the NRT.
- NCEH/ATSDR has offered to work with the Joint Information Center at the Unified Area Command in drafting responses to common community questions that may result from this event.

**Upcoming Issues:**

Assuming crude oil slicks impact sensitive habitats or commercial fishing beds, advisories may be necessary to advise the public. This may necessitate coordination with FDA.

EPA air data will likely be arriving beginning over the weekend for review and comment by CDC/ATSDR. EPA has already requested 24 hour turnaround in our evaluation of the data similar to the support provided during Hurricane Katrina.